

The Effect of Exposure on Perceptions of Adolescent Self Harm

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Abstract

A large number of adolescent struggle with self harm, and due to the sensitive nature of the topic it is often overlooked. Although, this is a major problem it is largely misunderstood and many adolescents won't seek help for the behavior due to the fear of judgment from misconceptions. In response to this, the study examined the effects exposure to self harm has on perceptions of self harm. Contrary to the hypothesis, there was not a significant difference between those who were exposed to self harm, and those who weren't; however, the findings still implied that participants agreed with about half of the misconceptions. This shows this is still a negative connotation and stigma surrounding the behavior. This could lead to increased judgment.

Introduction

Previous Literature:

Best, 2006

The author found that teachers often react with shock, panic, and anxiety. Although this type of reaction can be understood, it is incredibly unhelpful to the adolescent who went to the teacher for help.

Laukkanen, Rissanen, Honkalampi, Kylmä, Tolmune and Hintikka, 2009

The authors found that the lifetime prevalence of self-cutting was 11.5% and 10.2% for other forms of self-harm. The prevalence of current self-cutting was 1.8%. In many situation the adolescent will fear ultimatums or judgment in disclosing the behavior

Pavlishina, 2008

Self harm is often undetected and cloaked in secrecy

Goals of the Current Study and Hypotheses:

To determine the misconceptions surrounding self harm

- o The current study aims to address these misconceptions and determine if exposure to the topic increases them
- o I expect that direct exposure to self harm will increase the negative attitude surrounding self harm

Method

Participants: The 66 participants (70% female; ages 18-43, $M = 21$, $SD = 3.98$) were a convenience sample of students at Fort Lewis College who voluntarily participated in our study in a classroom setting, All participants provided written informed consent.

Independent Variable Conditions (between groups design):

Condition 1: Exposure to self harm in the form of a written story

Condition 2: Exposure to a topic non-related to self harm in the form of a written story (The princess and the frog)

Dependent Variable Measures:

Perceptions of self harm: the participant will take a survey that will address myths and facts regarding self harm

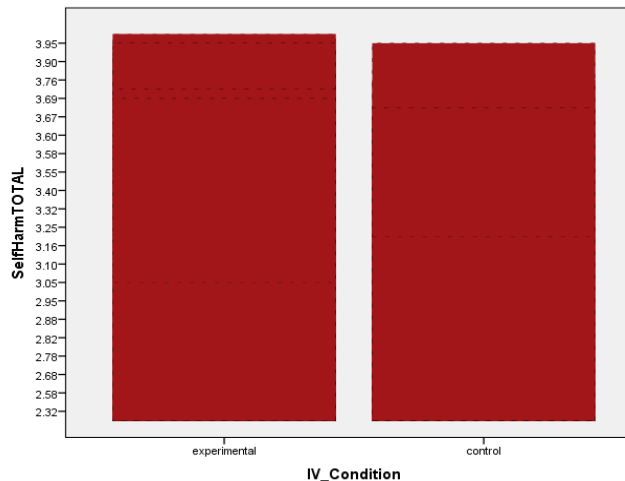
Procedure: 1) Randomly assigned participants to conditions,

2) Evaluate the participants perceptions of self harm

3) Debrief with an emphasis on the sensitive nature of the topic



Figure. The figure indicates that there wasn't significant difference between the scores of the participants with the experimental or control story



| IV Condition | N | Mean | Standard deviation |
|--------------|----|------|--------------------|
| Experimental | 29 | 3.31 | .505 |
| Control | 31 | 3.29 | .062 |

Results

I conducted an independent sample t-test with alpha set at .05 to evaluate the hypothesis that reading a story that was directly related to self harm would increase misconceptions and encourage negative perceptions of self harm more than an unrelated story. The misconceptions and perceptions were evaluated using a survey that addresses myths and facts about self harm. This was scored using a 1-5 scale, where 5 is agreement with truth and 1 is agreement with the myth.

According to the self harm survey, participants with a self harm story reported a similar likelihood to agree with the misconceptions as the participants with the control story that was unrelated to self harm.

$t(66) = 5.5, p = .883$

Discussion

The findings did not support the initial hypothesis that participants exposed to self harm would be more likely to agree with the misconceptions. Despite this setback and disagreement, the current study did agree with the previous literature. It showed that there are misconceptions and negative perceptions related to self harm. To expand on the previous literature, the component of the exposure to self harm was added; however, as mentioned, this didn't produce any significant results. The strengths of the study include: random assignment to the experiment conditions, which increase internal validity, and the limited diversity with the convenience sample. The limitations of the study are as follows: convince sampling which limits external validity and a smaller sample size.

Implications of the study suggest that there needs to be more education surrounding self harm. Although there was not a significance difference between the groups, the results still indicated that the participants were agreeing with some of the common myths. For future research, I would suggest using a more vivid example of self harm (ie: video footage) and addressing whether personal exposure to self harm had any impacts on the results.

References

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